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Code switching, a linguistic tactic used to alternate between two or more languages or registers, allows individuals to navigate their participation in conversation with others, especially when they recognize themselves as a minority within a particular setting. Queer people often utilize code switching tactics through gesture, body language, clothing, and other forms of non-verbal communication as a means to *pass* as straight in social settings where they feel uncomfortable or unsafe communicating their queer identity. In this paper, I write about my choreographic work *pass/codes* and the ways in which it addresses the monitoring and policing of queer identities in public and social settings. In addition to examining everyday gestural code switching, this paper also focuses on how the movement, costume, set pieces, and other elements of *pass/codes* provide a commentary on how gender and sexuality are read on the dance stage and offer representation that moves us toward a queer sociality.

PASS/CODES: CODE SWITCHING FOR SURVIVAL

by

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INTRODUCTION

My choreographic work *pass/codes* addresses the ways in which society monitors, controls, and polices people's identities, specifically those who identify as part of the queer community (people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, gender non-binary, transgender, etc.). As a response to such monitoring, many people in the LGBTQ community resort to what I have identified as gestural "code switching" as a survival tool in the world.[1] My research is supported by viewings of choreographic work that deals with issues of the representation of sexuality on stage, queer gestures and embodiment, and code-switching/passing strategies in professional settings. I draw upon people's lived experiences in this work and as such, it brings to light real issues that queer people experience daily.

This work emerges from my own lived experiences as a gay man who has and continues to code switch in order to feel safe and comfortable in heteronormative situations. From the way I lower the pitch of my voice when I'm around my father to how I suppress my tendency to talk with my hands at places like an auto shop, I am constantly negotiating how I present myself, and my queerness, in public. I can remember the first time my father told me I was "acting funny"—I was incredibly perplexed, as well as upset by it. "Stop talking like that and moving your hands so much. You're acting funny," he told me. It was in that exact moment, as a short, nerdy middle school boy, that I realized my own effeminate tendencies. I learned to hide them, to alter the ways that I

said or did things that people may perceive as feminine. I can even look back at home videos of myself during that time and see how differently I tried to present myself. I feel like I am looking at a stranger in those moments. I so often used code switching to alter my voice, eliminate unnecessary movements of my body, and distract people from asking about my interests and personal life. Much of my family didn't understand me. I liked music, dance, and using my imagination which was in stark contrast to the athletic and outdoorsy interests of most men in my family. When I joined in on things like hunting and fishing, I found myself slipping into a completely different persona. I would wear clothing that made me feel invisible, limit conversation that would lead to talk of my artistic interests, and make the greatest effort to blend my movements in with the men around me. What was the point of all of this? Was it to be "one of the boys" or simply to make it through the day without being picked on or bullied? I think it was likely both. Regardless, my efforts to be someone that I was not were aimed at surviving the setting in which I lived. These experiences both feed my interest in queer studies and in how sexuality intersects with dance. For this reason, I strive to make work that speaks to the queer experience as well as provides space for queer choreographers, dancers, and spectators.

In *pass/codes*, I explore the ways that people communicate and express their identities to one another through gesture and the implications that gender and sexuality have on relationships between individuals. Riffing on cross-dressing, I employ tactics such as "cross-gendering," where I place "masculine" gestures on female presenting

bodies and vice-versa to investigate how gendered gestures transgress heteronormative expectations. Playing with these gestures, I aim to queer the stage and offer audiences a more inclusive framework to read gender and sexuality in dance. I also explore the ways in which relationships are presented and read on stage through manipulation of perspective, power dynamics, and interactions among dancers. This was a challenge, to say the least, due to the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. When beginning this project, I aimed to use touch and proximity as a major choreographic element of my work. With safety restrictions needed due to the pandemic, however, I had to reimagine ways to present relationships on stage that did not incorporate touch or close proximity. This ultimately led me to more creative avenues in the making of the work.

In this paper I reflect on *pass/codes* as a work that aims to create more visibility for the queer community by showing how LGBTQ+ people navigate their interactions with others within a heteronormative world. I shed light on the challenges that queer people experience in their everyday lives. I also invite the viewers of my choreographed work and the readers of this paper to reflect on how LGBTQ+ people are present in everyone's lives: as friends, colleagues, or even family members. It is my intent to move viewers and readers to make personal connections to the work, drawing either from personal experience or from observation of situations that required "cross-gesturing" in order to establish safety in social settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In "Aunty Fever: A Queer Impression," Kareem Khubchandani writes of the importance of origin stories, especially in the lives of queer people.[2] He believes that origin stories provide validity and honor the history of a community. In this way, I set out to create *pass/codes* as a means of shedding light on the lives of queer people, including my own. My story, while unique to me, relates to many other queer experiences and corporealities. Khubchandani references the impact of his aunties and their dancing on his identity as a queer artist who performs in drag as LaWhore Vagistan. While I do not personally have a connection with the art of drag, it is the incredible amount of freedom that drag artists feel when performing that draws me to it. When performing as LaWhore, Khubchandani dances like his aunties, wears the same saris as his aunties, and embodies characteristics of his aunties. He even admits that he too will eventually be an aunty one day. I read this performance as a means of code switching from a male presenting identity to a drag identity in which Khubchandani can embody and honor his queer identity as well as his aunties' identities.

In "29 Effeminate Gestures: Choreographer Joe Goode and the Heroism of Effeminacy," David Gere provides an analysis of Joe Goode's signature work, *29 Effeminate Gestures.*[34] Through performative writing, Gere closely looks at the way in which each of Goode's gestures queers the stage in what has conventionally been considered "inappropriate" ways for men to move, both on and off stage. The gestures in Goode's solo are shown repetitively, providing a differing insight into each gesture's

meaning. The gestures are much more than simple movements as they are imbued with specific meanings given to them by society. These effeminate gestures are performed politely, awkwardly, artfully, and confrontationally. In each of these iterations, Goode shows that effeminacy can look different and feel different to each person that embodies it. In writing on this important work, Gere claims that effeminacy, in and outside of dance, is heroic in that it takes courage to go against compulsory heteronormativity. To survive in a heteronormative world as a queer person, I would argue, often requires masking and camouflaging our most personal self-identifications. To move toward a sociality in which queer people feel less of this oppression takes courage and heroism; for Gere, Goode's *29 Effeminate Gestures* exemplifies such heroism.

In "Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling: Approaching Kevin Aviance," José Esteban Muñoz examines gesture as a central part of one's identity.[5] He discusses what he calls "queer evidence." Part of his initial argument is that this queer evidence has historically been used solely to label people for means of punishment or degradation. He argues that this evidence can just as well be used to identify someone in a positive light and that it creates a sort of "visual lexicon" that is much stronger than language alone. For instance, Muñoz argues that such movements as a swish in a male's gait communicates queer evidence through the traces that it leaves more effectively than anything that male could verbally communicate. Muñoz's "queer evidence" supports my analysis of the impact that one's gestural movements has on their identity and how

altering these gestures aids one's ability to code switch in a similar way as linguistic code switching.

Munoz's idea of "queer evidence" shows how one's identity leaves traces more powerful than words would. Like Muñoz, I pay attention to gesture and language; I relate the alternating between queer gestures and straight-passing gestures to code switching amongst bilingual speakers. Jeff Friedman, in *Blood and Books: Performing Code Switching*, similarly discusses code switching that occurs in dance as he analyzes a student's performance.[6] Referencing linguist Michael Halliday, Friedman notes that "utterances often integrate with other non-language activity into a single event" when one code switches between verbal and non-verbal language.[7] These integrations, which include "dress codes in the form of costuming, body language in the form of choreographed movement, and enhanced staging of spatial relationships between performers and among other props and set pieces," are various elements that contribute to the ways individuals code switch.[8] In choreographing *pass/codes*, I use such mechanics to emphasize the non-verbal code switching tactics that are so regularly applied by queer people in public settings.

When looking at code switching strategies, I also turn to Anna L. Spradlin's "The Price of Passing: A Lesbian Perspective on Authenticity in Organizations" in which she discusses six tactics that she has used herself and observed others using to *pass* as heteronormative in a professional environment.[9] Distancing, distracting, dissociating, dodging, denying, and deceiving are each ways that Spradlin says queer people use to

pass among their straight peers. While she discusses them in the context of conversations in the workplace, I would argue that they can and are used with body language and presentation of identity as well. For example, Spradlin discusses that distancing could be used by furthering yourself from queer topics in conversation, but what about also physically distancing yourself from queer colleagues? The addition of the physical body adds another layer to the effort that one puts into attempting to veil their identity and pass as another. In this way, the individual is diverting attention from their body language by placing actual distance in between their own and that of the other queer person.

Through this project, I aim to do what Thomas DeFrantz calls *making queer* in "Queer Dance in Three Acts."[10] He discusses how he, as a queer person and artist, is constantly *being queer*, because that is part of who he is, which comes easily and naturally. He explains that the next step is *doing queer,* which requires a sense of effort and an interaction between his queer self and someone else. In *doing queer,* one is emphasizing their queerness in order to communicate it and, in turn, is actively pushing against heteronormative standards. At its core, this project is a way to take certain lived experiences of queer people in everyday scenarios and situate them on a stage, to highlight and focus on the ways that queer people navigate the oppressive act of code switching. In doing this, I am firstly *being queer*, as I openly identify as a gay man and proudly welcome whatever that entails into my presentation of identity. Part of that *being queer*, DeFrantz says, is understood as a "sideward inevitability that puts me near some, but further from others."[11] This furthering, which Spradlin would call distancing, calls for

the need to code switch in order to lessen the space between that of the queer person and the heteronormative situation. The *doing*, DeFrantz says, is harder. It is the effort that one puts into *doing queer* in order to communicate their identity to others that differentiates it from just *being queer*. This, I would argue, is the opposite of code switching, possibly even code exaggerating. I, myself, acknowledge moments when I am with other gay men and I exaggerate my queerness with the overuse of the word "girl" as form of address, indulging in the desire to cross my legs more, and using personal touch as a means of connection. Lastly, he discusses *making queer*, which is actually what resonates most with me at this moment in life. This project is completely about me *making* queerness visible and important on the stage. DeFrantz says it is "something like doing queer on steroids," which exemplifies my choreographic process at its core. How do I take a real, visceral, lived experience and amplify it on stage? This is especially difficult when my choreography tends to exist on the more subtle side. DeFrantz also notes "to move an action or a dance to the realm of queer, we assume that queer exists, and that an action of 'making' can happen inside or outside of queer terms." As Susan Foster points out in "Closets Full of Dances," many queer artists not only made dance outside of queer terms, but they made efforts to hide the implicit queerness that may be present because of their own *being* and *doing* of queer in their personal lives.[12] In my project, I not only show queer bodies and identities, but also the façade that so many queer people must put on just to survive on a daily basis.

Survival, in the sense that I am using it, can mean a range of things. Queer people often mask their identities in scenarios where they feel unsafe, where they may be harmed just for being themselves. We read news stories of hate crimes regularly where transgender women, flamboyant gay men, and so many other queer people suffer harm due to hate crimes. Code switching to pass as straight has long been a survival tool to avoid harm by blending in with the crowd. In a less violent example, I recall a story from a prior oral history project I conducted in which a transgender man spoke of his effortless ability to pass as a man in most social situations but struggled as a young ballet dancer (pre-transition) in which their movements didn't seem to fit in with the other girls, yet they didn't present as a male so they could not dance the men's parts.[13] In this way, they adapted their movement qualities in order to just survive their daily ballet class experience.

METHODOLOGY

My work challenges heteronormativity, both on and off stage. I recognize my own privilege as a cis gender white male, but also want to acknowledge my presence as a queer choreographer. I make work that establishes safe spaces for queer people to express their gender and sexuality as well as experience diverse representations of queer identity on stage. In *pass/codes,* I set out to "make queer" in the way that DeFrantz defines it.[14] I created the roles of the dancers and each section with some of the following questions in mind: How can I represent multiple modes of queerness in my work? Can I provide representation that makes all queer people feel seen, although they may not closely relate

to any one character in the piece? In what ways can my work take steps to both normalize queerness and disrupt heteronormativity?

When starting this work, I aimed to find intersections between the dancers' identities and the lives that were portrayed through the choreography. In our first rehearsal together, I asked the dancers to write words that resonated with them regarding how they identify. Some of the words written were curious, flamboyant, bi, straight, and open. I welcomed the dancers to share about their own sexual identities over the course of the creation of *pass/codes,* but never explicitly asked them to disclose this information to me or the group. This, I hope, allowed the dancers to feel open to explore their identities within the work as well as make connections to the lived experiences of queer people.

I do not think that any artist can make work that provides explicit representation for *all* people of all identities. With that said, I attempted to make a work that the audience could relate to, whether it be in relationship to themselves or possibly someone that they know. Some of the representation manifested more throughout the process of making the work but was not overtly apparent in the product. For instance, the solo section, danced by Chelsea, was initially created using pronouns to guide the movement generation. I used they/them pronouns to show a fluid, non-conforming approach to the beginning and end where the dancer explored space with indirect movements of her limbs, weight shifts in and out of plié, and a blending of gestures taken from earlier solos in the work. She/her pronouns were used to make the feminine side of the solo, which was later matched with pink lighting and a pink skirt. The masculine side was guided by

using he/him pronouns and symbols associated with normative masculinity, as well as blue lighting and a men's sports jacket. In doing this, I wanted to show the multiplex identities that one can embody. I argue that no person is truly completely masculine, completely feminine, or completely void of either, but rather that all people embody socially constructed ideals associated with all of these identities.[15]

In exploring the ways code switching is used to pass as straight in heteronormative public situations, I used Spradlin's six passing tactics (distancing, dissociating, dodging, distracting, denying, and deceiving) both in process and in product for *pass/codes.*[16] These six tactics motivated exercises, improvisations, and choreographic tasks in the rehearsal setting. Used in this way, we could actually embody the tactics and experience how they affected our inner selves as well as how they produced certain movements. Once experienced, the movements were imbued by their origin, allowing the cast members to make connections between the tactics and the dance steps themselves. I also used Spradlin's tactics to structure and guide parts of the work. Drawing upon the *distracting* tactic, I created a trio where two men who had an attraction for one another used a woman to distract from their attraction. Although the men remained connected to one another by a band of fabric, the woman constantly disrupted their relationship to one another. Approaching this in a playful manner, I intended to show the application of Spradlin's tactic as a way that gay men often distract from their own queer identity by using their relationship with a woman to cover up what is apparent in their gay relationship.

When interacting with my cast and other collaborators, I strived to create an environment that encouraged openness and that promoted safe queer spaces. We shared our preferred pronouns at our first rehearsal as a cast and I expressed an interest in making queer topics important in our sessions. With that said, we would often discuss current topics within drag culture, women's studies, and queer theory that came up in rehearsal. It wasn't enough for me to simply be queer as the choreographer. I pushed myself to "do" queer as Thomas DeFrantz would define it.[17] I made an effort to discuss queer issues and push against normativity in our time together as a group. In both being queer and doing queer, I was able to *make* queer with this work.

Part of me making queer dance was rooted in the people I worked with. When choosing the cast, I made sure to solicit people that had an interest in working with this material, whether it be a personal investment or not. I also strived to find collaborators who had queer interests. The music editor for the soundtrack is my partner, who shares a deep interest in the representation of queer artists in the general arts community. I briefly collaborated with an MFA student in visual arts at UNCG who identifies as a part of the queer community. This artist and I met to discuss ideas for the panels and projections used throughout the work. While this collaboration didn't materialize, it was foundational in providing me perspective from another artistic medium and through the queer lens of someone invested in this type of inquiry.

The videographer that I worked with to create the film version of *pass/codes* was very open and interested in being able to represent this work. He and I met to discuss my

vision for the piece before filming because he wanted to make sure that the camera captured the most important elements. This may sound rather ordinary, but his intent was not. He felt strongly that the camera should help illuminate the intimate details of the subtleties of queer gestures in the choreography. My work was rooted in the many oblique details involved in code switching and the videographer was passionate about capturing those details. In this way, I consider him a collaborator in making queer dance more visible for the greater audience.

CHOREOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES FROM SETS, PROPS, AND COSTUMES

Clothing says a lot about who we are as people. In *Dress and Identity,* Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher write that "An individual's self and the identities this self incorporates are linked to positions the individual is assigned to or achieves within social structures... Dress confers identities on individuals as it communicates positions within these structures."[18] As noted, a person's dress confers their identity socially, but in many cases, it may not be one that the individual necessarily identifies intimately with. As much as clothing can be a manner of expressing one's true identity, it can also be a way of hiding one's inner self, allowing people to blend in and pass within the normative social framework. How does the clothing one wears impact their movement and how does that aid or hinder our ability to code switch?

In *pass/codes,* the costumes in certain sections not only clothed the dancers but helped in generating the movement, creating a mood, and structuring the overall flow of

the work. The use of these external stimuli added a new dimension to the work, allowing the dancers to quite literally *try on* different movement qualities and identities through clothing. Common phrases like "clothes make the man," "all buttoned up," and "who wears the pants in the relationship" suggest that social constructs surrounding gender codes and clothing go far beyond the garments themselves. They can go much deeper to a place of identity and embodiment. During the creative process, I observed that the dancers' somatic experiences were affected by the clothing they wore as their costume.

Wearing clothing leads to an embodiment of socially constructed ideals, perceptions, and norms simply by association. The meanings inscribed onto clothing colors, textures, and structure automatically influence the way that the wearer feels, thus causing changes in their bodies. This is what psychologists Adam and Galinsky refer to as "enclothed cognition" to "describe the systematic influence that clothes have on the wearer's psychological processes."[19] Part of this systematic influence includes the incredibly oppressive constraints attached to clothing. When clothing is assigned to one specific sex, society tells us that we must not only wear those clothes, but we are expected to act the normative role of that sex. The clothing thus becomes a uniform, prescribing acceptable behaviors for a binary between male and female sexes. For queer people, these expectations can complicate how they express their gender and sexual identity since the clothing itself carries such deeply embedded codes.

pass/codes includes various sections where costuming played an integral role in the artistic process. One of these sections is a solo in which I used colors, pronouns, and

clothing to manipulate movement and the use of the stage. I attempted to isolate movements considered "masculine" or "feminine" while choreographing on a female-presenting dancer's body. Using language to help drive the process, I used words such as she, her, soft, seductive, internal, and vulnerable when working on the feminine section of the solo. Chelsea, the dancer, related easily with the steps, but not with these words and the qualities that they invoked. When working on the masculine section, I prompted her with words such as he, him, forceful, direct, and external. Chelsea related much less to the actual movements in this section, but more closely with the movement qualities.

In her article, "Costume as a somatic tool in dance education: A provocation," Lorraine Smith writes about the effects that costuming may have as an external stimulus for dancers.[20] She argues that "Costume has the potential to be a highly impactful and somatic external stimuli. In particular, the design elements of a costume can help the wearer re-experience their body and develop in areas such as embodiment and identity transformation."[21] It wasn't until I added the costume pieces that the dance really began to come to life, providing an added layer of depth into the performer's experience. The dancer begins the solo in a plain gray t-shirt and gray bike shorts illuminated by a single path of light. She travels down the panel constantly moving parts of her body in various directions, almost free of any constraints besides the light which seems to be guiding her to something at the end of the path.

At the end of the light panel, she is handed a pink shirt from offstage and she, hesitantly, slides it over her gray shorts. There is a sense of rebellion in her demeanor,

almost instantly. With discomfort, she explores her feminine side as the pink skirt flounces about, occasionally catching air when she gives it a twirl. Using coded movements and parts of the body such as circling the pelvis, flicking the wrists, and gesturing coyly with the shoulder, I choreographed this section by intentionally conforming to western gender norms that would match the societal expectations imbued by the skirt. In reflecting on this section of the dance, Chelsea commented "I definitely felt uncomfortable putting the skirt on. The movement quality didn't feel like typical movements I would do. It isn't movement that is naturally in my embodied vocabulary and the skirt just amplified that. It felt very much like a costume that I was forced into. It was uncomfortable."[22] It was this discomfort that was so evident in her performance of the movements, but adding the skirt caused a more visceral reaction, felt only by her.

After the pink, feminine section, Chelsea travels to the opposite side of the stage where a navy sports coat is thrown at her from offstage. Reluctantly, she slips into the jacket and her movements are immediately more rigid. The dancer demonstrates a vocabulary consisting of tightly gripped fists, percussive strikes, and a cocky demeanor. This, Chelsea noted in rehearsal, felt more comfortable and familiar to her own lived femininity than the movements on the other side of the stage. "When I went to the other side and put on the jacket, I didn't feel the same way as I did with the skirt. The movement wasn't necessarily in my wheelhouse, but the qualities felt better in my body. The jacket felt right on me, almost like I had slipped into a character that was familiar to me."[23]

The clothing in the *pass/codes* solo was used as a choreographic element and tool for movement creation; however, it also played a role in the deeper understanding of *how* to perform the movement. With the physical act of putting the garments on her body, it seemed that there was an instant shift in the way the dancer connected to the steps. Is this shift due to socially constructed codes surrounding clothing and gender or more so due to the design of the clothing items? Possibly both. Smith, in reflecting on the effects of costuming on her student dancers says that, "Costume structure, materials, layers and body fit are all creating a sensorial experience that affects how the wearer feels and moves, including tension in the body and use of breath. Costume is therefore engaging the wearer haptically."[24]

Could this shift in the dancer's embodiment of the gendered movement qualities have been stimulated by the sensorial experience within the clothing? The pink skirt that the dancer wore was light, soft, and bouncy when she moved. Choreographically, the dancer touched the skirt, feeling the material, before even putting it on her body. Could this touch, have provided a sensation that allowed the dancer to embody the feminized qualities on a deeper level? The navy sports coat was thick, with no stretch or give. The fabric was brittle and heavy. When enrobing herself in this, could the dancer have felt the rigidness and tension that she was about to explore preemptively? It seems that these are all factors that contribute to the encoded nature of clothing. When putting these costume pieces on her body, Chelsea did not try and extrapolate what each element meant to her,

but rather, layered on an innate sense of social cognition which affected the way she embodied the movements in the clothing.

Another element that I considered in this solo was color. A study conducted by Ishii, Numazaki, and Tado'oka investigated the effects of wearing pink and blue by male participants on their attitudes toward men.[25] The study found that there were increased effects on self-cognition when males wore pink, rather than blue, which they argued was likely because of the familiarity of the color blue to men. Men have been conditioned to feel comfortable wearing the color blue and, therefore, there were very little effects on them. In contrast to this study, the solo dancer in my work experienced a similar reaction with the blue jacket as the men in this study, even though she identifies as female. Putting the jacket on, for her, aligned more closely with her sense of self whereas putting the pink skirt on increased her self-cognition and made her more aware of how she was performing her femininity. Similarly, Eicher and Roach-Higgins write that "meanings communicated by dress may emanate from its basic type, one of its properties (e.g., color, shape), or a composite of its component types and/or properties. Thus, the color (a single property) of a businessman's tie may be a more important indicator of his identity than is his total ensemble of suit, shirt, tie, socks, and shoes."[26] The color, shape, size, texture, etc could have just as much of an impact on the wearer's experience in the garment as the garment as a whole; a pink coat can elicit discomfort in a male simply because of the encoded weight that the color pink has in our society. Does this mean that a man would feel more comfortable in a blue dress than a pink one? Probably not. I would argue,

however, that gender codes manifest in so many different variations with clothing and it only takes one small element to invoke an internal and embodied reaction.

In another section of *pass/codes,* Jonah, a tall slender male appears from the wings of the stage clad in a short navy dress. His movements are smooth and fluid, especially in the soft articulation of his hands. There is no indication that the performer is *trying* to appear as a woman, but simply a man dancing on stage in a dress. In this moment, Jonah is purely himself, but the dress allows the audience to view him differently. Maybe this is because wearing the dress on stage is liberating and allows him to show the effeminacy that makes up part of who he is off-stage, in daily life. In this reading of his performance, the dancer embraces his femininity and communicates it freely and openly. In their study, Eicher and Roach-Higgins, "explored the relation of dress, as a means of communication, to the process whereby individuals establish identities and selves and attribute identities to others."[27] From the performer's brief vignette on stage, a vulnerable moment for the dancer, the audience is provided a window into his identity, one that communicates much louder and clearer than words. The dress allows him to outwardly express a layer of himself to the spectator.

When reflecting on his experience, Jonah said "In the dress I felt very empowered. I felt different from any other costume that I wore. I would just feel a wave of confidence and a new character emerge that was sure of themselves and fierce. My movement became more confident as well!"[28] What is interesting about this experience is that I never coached Jonah to exude confidence or explore a different character than in

any other section of the piece. His performance was shaped by the garment he wore as he merely existed on stage as himself. In retrospect, I had to give very little direction to him when putting this vignette together. It was almost as if putting the dress on revealed an instinctual understanding of how to perform his part. In Jonah's performance, wearing the dress revealed a different realization and expression of his identity than any other costume that he wore in the work. His sensation of empowerment and "fierceness" was easily recognized by any viewer, and more importantly, felt by him on stage.

In a third section of *pass/codes*, two female dancers perform a love duet navigating their attraction to one another all while separated by a plexiglass wall. In this duet, the two women wear gray bike shorts and men's white dress shirts. The dancers chose *how* they wanted to wear the shirts, or rather, they assumed how I wanted them to wear them. One dancer wore the shirt buttoned up and the other wore it open, revealing a gray crop top underneath. When I realized the difference between the two appearances, I decided to keep their initial choices. Chelsea, the dancer who wore her shirt buttoned up, felt a sense of security and structure whereas Emmalee, the dancer who wore her shirt open, felt "an overwhelming sense of vulnerability."[29] [30] For Emmalee, this duet was all about being vulnerable to her emotions and how they manifested themselves in her performance. The other dancer, however, felt too vulnerable with her shirt open, prompting her to button up and present herself more "put together."

Whether the fabric, color, appearance, or social implications, clothing is impactful to a person's embodiment when wearing it. In the case of costume choices in *pass/codes*,

the clothing amplified certain qualities of movement and gave the performers a different sense of being. Chelsea experienced discomfort when wearing what our society would tell her is appropriate, a pink skirt. Conversely, she felt a sense of familiarity when covering up in a rigid men's jacket. For Jonah, putting on a dress and sauntering across the stage made him feel powerful and fierce, something that no other costume made him feel. In no way was he "performing" an identity of something or someone else, but the dress allowed him to show his authentic self. The two dancers in the love duet contrasted each other in their response to their willingness to cover up or reveal their vulnerability. The experience the dancers had wearing the costumes penetrated much deeper than costuming often does, affecting the way they sensed, felt, and moved through the work.

Another major element in *pass/codes* was the use of props/scenery. I knew from the outset that I wanted to utilize panels to help contour the stage space in interesting ways, but what I didn't know was the responsibility those panels would take on due to the pandemic. Since the work would be shown virtually, I wanted to find a way to show brief intimate portraits throughout the work. The panels provided a means to show projections, to hide dancers behind, to display the silhouettes of dancers on, and to allow dancers to "touch" one another.

I intended to use projections to show close ups of gestures and filmic edits suggesting physical touch between bodies. I was able to do this to a certain extent, but not as fully as planned. Projections became more part of the transitions in *pass/codes,* allowing the viewer to see subtleties that were not as visible through the live stream. By

showing a close-up image of hands gently touching one another during Jonah's vignette in a dress, I aimed to bring focus to the contrast between the presence of a male body and the intimacy of soft hands.[31] Using the projection of a woman's hands moving softly, in combination with Jonah's dress-clad male body moving with effeminacy was my attempt to disrupt a heteronormative framework for men's expected role in concert dance.

In another section, a projection of Chelsea leaning against a wall, showed an intimate look at the internal conflict between choosing to code switch to blend in or allow her queerness to show. This projection led into her solo where the audience watches her struggle between gendered clothing, colors, and movements.

In one of the most emotionally palpable moments of the work, two women explore their attraction toward one another while being separated by a clear, plexiglass panel. This panel was initially a necessary barrier to allow them to touch in compliance with pandemic safety protocols, but it also added a layer to the work that I hadn't expected early on. The panel served as a barrier, both physically and metaphorically. As much as the two dancers desired to touch, they were always divided by this transparent boundary. This boundary represented the presence of homophobia in our society, which prevents many queer people from expressing their love in public, or in some cases in private as well. In *pass/codes,* the viewer can see the dancers long for one another's touch and affection, but never quite attain it. While emotionally heavy, I think it is necessary to show why code switching is necessary for queer people. This duet allowed the viewer to

see inside a possible, and likely, scenario experienced by so many individuals and this would not have been possible without the incorporation of the set piece.

Another Covid-related scenic element was the single strip of stretchy white cloth used in the trio section of *pass/codes*. This cloth symbolized a connection between two men that was constantly disrupted by a third dancer, whose presence was meant to distract from the relationship between the two men. The fabric allowed me to show the viewer a tangible connection between the two men without them ever connecting through touch. The fabric added a playfulness to the choreography which helped suggest youthfulness and experimentation. I drew upon this playful nature to help show how many queer youth distract from their sexuality by establishing "friendships" with straight individuals of the opposite sex.

CONCLUSION

In reflecting on the final product of *pass/codes*, I am both pleased and motivated. I am happy that I was able to make a stage work that included costumes, props, technology, and most importantly, that provided representation for a community and on a topic that impacts queer people daily. The restrictions set forth by the Covid-19 pandemic ultimately pushed me to think outside the box and find unconventional solutions to convey the topic. I am, however, motivated to continue this work. I think that there is much more work to be done to investigate how queer people code switch in order to pass every day, especially in the way choreographers often expect dancers to code switch to present a heteronormative narrative. I have set out on a journey to push my own work and

the work of others to be more inclusive and to challenge the conventions of concert dance.

Making queer dance, as Thomas DeFrantz writes, should go against the grain of normativity.[32] As queer artists, I believe we should push ourselves to be, do, and make queer in our lives and our work. Without this practice, we allow the normative constructs to continue, creating a need for code switching to still occur to maintain "comfort" in social situations, and in some cases, sheer survival.

My time in the MFA program in the School of Dance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has been life changing. My research throughout this time has revolved around gender and sexuality in dance, allowing me to delve into facets of queer studies and dance studies that I had wanted to explore for years. In making *pass/codes,* I discovered a more socially conscious choreographer in me. I am inspired to continue making work which considers a broader range of identities on the dance stage and that globally moves us toward a queer sociality.

NOTES

[1] This paper focuses on code switching as a tool for survival, however, I acknowledge that code switching tactics can be used as a form of strengthening and asserting community membership as well. For example, the code switching that occurs in conversations between bilingual Latinx people living in the United States often reinforces bonds and builds community. In this way, code switching is positive and empowering to those individuals. The way I address code switching among the queer community could be seen as analogous to the ways that African American people often change the way they speak in professional (i.e. "white") settings as opposed to familial settings or settings where the majority of people are African American.

[2] Kareem Khubchandani. "Aunty Fever: A Queer Impression," in *Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings,* ed. Clare Croft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) 199-204.

[3] David Gere, "29 Effeminate Gestures: Choreographer Joe Goode and the Heroism of Effeminacy," in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On & Off the Stage,* ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) 349-381.

[4] *29 Effeminate Gestures,* choreographed by Joe Goode, 1987.

[5] Jose Esteban Muñoz, "Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling: Approaching Kevin Aviance, in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity,* ed. José Esteban Muñoz, Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson, Ochieng' Nyongó Tavia Amolo, and Ann Pellegrini (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 65-82.

[6] Jeff Friedman, "Blood and Books: Performing Code Switching," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research 9, no. 2, art. 46* (2008).

[7] Friedman, "Blood and Books."

[8] Ibid.

[9] Anna L. Spradlin, "The Price of 'Passing': A Lesbian Perspective on Authenticity in Organizations," *Management Communication Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1998): 598–605.

[10] Thomas DeFrantz."Queer Dance in Three Acts," in *Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings,* ed. Clare Croft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 169-179.

[11] DeFrantz, "Queer Dance in Three Acts," 170.

[12] Susan Leigh Foster, "Closets Full of Dances: Modern Dance's Performance of Masculinity and Sexuality," in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On & Off the Stage,* ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) 147-210.

[13] Chris Strauss, video chat with the author, March 25, 2020.

[14] DeFrantz, "Queer Dance in Three Acts."

[15] Judith Butler, in "Critically Queer," argues that no one chooses to subscribe to a specific gender norm, but that from birth, human beings cite gender norms in order to be recognized as an individual.

[16] Spradlin, "The Price of Passing," 598-605.

[17] DeFrantz, "Queer Dance."

[18] Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joann B. Eicher, and Kim K. P. Johnson, *Dress and Identity*, (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995)

[19] Hajo Adam and Adam Galinsky, "Enclothed Cognition," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48, no. 4 (2012): 918–18.

[20] Lorraine Smith, "Costume as a Somatic Tool in Dance Education: A Provocation," *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices* 12, no. 2 (2020): 255–65.

[21] Smith, "Costume as a Somatic Tool in Dance Education."

[22] Chelsea Hilding, phone conversation with author, March 27, 2021

[23] Ibid.

[24] Smith, "Costume…"

[25] Kunio Ishii, Makoto Numazaki, and Yoshika Tado'oka, "The Effect of Pink/Blue Clothing on Implicit and Explicit Gender-Related Self-Cognition and Attitudes among Men," *Japanese Psychological Research* 61, no. 2 (2019): 123–32.

[26] Roach-Higgins, Eicher, and Johnson, *Dress and Identity.*

[27] Ibid.

[28] Jonah Carrel, text message to author, March 27, 2021.

[29] Chelsea Hilding, phone conversation with author, March 27, 2021

[30] Emmalee Bradley, conversation with author, March 27, 2021.

[31] As Susan Foster notes in "Closets Full of Dances: Modern Dance's Performance of Masculinity and Sexuality," images such as clenched fists and upright torsos have been associated with men's presentation on the modern dance stage for much of its history.

[32] DeFrantz, "Queer Dance in Three Acts."

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